THE SPIRITUAL LIFE OF THE SUNDAY SCHOOL

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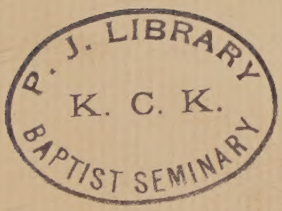

THE SPIRITUAL LIFE OF THE SUNDAY SCHOOL

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The Spiritual Life of the Sunday School.

By

Rev. J. Wilbur Chapman, D. D.

Author of

"And Peter," "Received Ye the Holy Ghost?"
"The Surrendered Life," "The Secret
of a Happy Day," etc.

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INTRODUCTION.

The four chapters of this book appeared in four different articles in *The Sunday School Times*, written by request of the publishers. They were thus brought particularly to the attention of Sunday-school workers, and are now sent forth in book form, first, because of a special request, and, second, because I have been told the words would be helpful to many readers.

This is my earnest desire.

J. WILBUR CHAPMAN.

New York City, 1899.

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THE SPIRITUAL LIFE OF THE SUNDAY SCHOOL

CHAPTER I.

THE SUPERINTENDENT'S OPPORTUNITY.

To be a co-worker with God is a position of honor for every one, and, indeed, every one is called to service of some sort in the household of God; for there is no thought that there shall be laggards either in the Father's house or in the Master's vineyard. But, while there is work for every one to do, some positions are of greater importance than others, and those who are called to fill them are indeed highly honored of God.

It is generally agreed that the position next in importance to that of the minister

of the gospel is the superintendent of the Sunday school, and in some schools it would almost seem that the opportunity is beyond that of the pastor. But wherever the school may be, and whatever its character, happy the man who has been called of God to fill the position, and upon whose service God has set his seal of approval. It is doubtless true that there are those in this position, as in the ministry, who have never really been called to it, and others out of it who have been called, and have not taken heed to the call; but the same tests may be applied to one, in order that he may really know if he is called to this position, that would be applied to one entering the ministry.

1. A constant inclination to the work, and an impression, that will not be put aside, that God would have you do it. The question of fitness may not enter into it at all at the first.

2. The impression of others that you are fitted for the work, or may become so. God not infrequently sends his messages through his own people, and thus it is true, here at

least, that "the voice of the people is the voice of God."

3. Some degree of success in the carrying out of the work, not only judged from your own standpoint, but from the position of those who view you from the outside, and are competent to form an opinion.

4. A growing desire to do God's will, and to be used in any way that may contribute to his glory.

Very naturally, the subject divides itself into three main heads, — the man, the place, and the work.

I. THE MAN.

He must be a man of real enthusiasm for his work if he would be a successful superintendent. It is a necessary qualification; half-hearted service counts for little everywhere, but in the superintendent's desk it is a positive hindrance. Why should not one be running over with enthusiasm when he remembers that he has a place that every angel in the skies would delight to fill?

He must be willing to change his methods every Sunday, if need be, until he has a method which will be used of God, first, in leading scholars into the school, and then leading them to Christ. There is a scriptural foundation for this change of method found in the fifteenth chapter of Luke: how long did the shepherd seek for the sheep, the woman for the lost piece of money, and the father for his son? Until they found them.

And, if this is the spirit of the superintendent, he will find that God will surely set his seal of approval upon his work, and not only upon his work, but upon his spirit.

He must be a man of pure life. God forgive the one who dares to stand in the superintendent's desk with unconfessed or hidden sin in his heart. He is hindering the work; he is standing in the way of the progress of the kingdom; he is unconsciously to himself, possibly, injuring for eternity other lives, for which he will one day be called to a strict account. God always uses for a permanent work of blessing the life that is clean.

He must be a completely consecrated man. This is absolutely essential. The idea of consecration is separation, and it is of a two-fold application. There must be separation from the world, and all that it means. There can be no life of compromise if one is to possess the power of God. We must "come out from the world and be separate," and not even touch the thing that is unclean. But there must also be separation unto Christ as well as from the world. He must be the Lord of the life, must perfectly control the whole being, or the work will not be all that is desired.

I am aware that this is the ideal superintendent I have pictured in these few sentences, but I am also persuaded of the fact that the ideal is not an impossibility, but may be attained unto by us all.

II. THE PLACE.

The place occupied by the superintendent is a most exalted one for various reasons.

1. He is the teachers' ideal. They placed

him in his position, and, if he is to make the school a success, he must strive to realize their opinion of him. As a Bible student, a Christ-like spirit, and an executive head, it is not so much what he says, but the way he says it. A great revival in Dundee, Scotland, under McCheyne, came not because of his preaching, but because of the seraphic look on his face and the heavenly atmosphere of his presence, and one man at least was converted by hearing him say, "Thou knowest that we love thee."

2. In his position he is the scholars' example. In New Testament times they brought sick people that the shadow of the man of God might fall upon them, and they be healed. And no superintendent is perfectly true to his position if he does not preach Christ to his scholars in the way he walks the streets, conducts his business, and sits in the house of God, as well as when he stands upon the platform and speaks or prays. Every superintendent ought to lead his scholars nearer to Christ by his own consistent life.

3. He is the pastor's helper. No one should stand nearer to the leader of the church-work than the superintendent of the Sunday school. He is in touch with the home life of the church as even the pastor is not. He knows the needs of the scholars as no one else. He is, by virtue of his position, the leading lay worker of the parish, and he ought to make his life tell for the help of the pastor and the glory of God. No Sunday-school superintendent can fill his position well if there is lack of sympathy between him and the pastor of the church.

III. THE WORK.

Too much cannot be said about the work of the superintendent. It is boundless in its opportunities, and can be measured not only by time, but reaches into eternity. The principal part of the work is: —

1. To impart to the scholars, through the teachers, a knowledge of the Word of God. While it is true that the teaching is done

directly by the teacher, yet it is within the power of the superintendent to strike the key-note in the teaching, and determine both its practical and its spiritual character. When we realize the power of God's Word to keep our boys and girls in the hour of temptation, who can tell what an honor it is for any one to fill such a position? That superintendent is to be pitied who does not thoroughly equip his scholars with a knowledge of the Word of God, for one day God will call him to an account for his negligence.

2. The next part of his work is to build up character. This is to be accomplished not only by precept, but by example. The Word of God teems with illustrations calculated to stir the minds of even the little children. It is possible for the superintendent to have for every Sunday some short story bearing on the lesson found within the pages of the Bible which would fasten itself on the mind of a child, and never lose its influence, even in eternity.

But such teaching will have little effect upon the lives of the scholars if it is not

supported by the clean, consistent life of the superintendent who presents the ideal.

"Thou must be true thyself if thou the truth wouldst teach,
Thy soul must ever follow if thou another soul wouldst reach."

3. But the great work is to win the scholars for Christ. However, in order to do this, the following things are necessary for us to remember: —

(1) The superintendent must realize that the scholar, when he has reached the age of accountability, and has not chosen Christ, is lost. No one can tell certainly when this age is, but, the Bible being true, "he that hath not the Son of God hath not life, but the wrath of God abideth on him."

(2) He must also understand that the scholar not yet a Christian really needs Christ, and the need is just as great as that found in the experience of the aged man or aged woman out of the kingdom of God.

(3) He must also clearly understand that it is a possible thing for a child to be a Chris-

tian. The history of the church is rich in illustration of the fact that very many have come to Christ before the age of twelve years.

(4) There must also be some real concern, on the part of the superintendent of the school, for the scholars under his care. It is not possible for any great amount of work to be accomplished in the salvation of the scholars until first there is a great desire on the part of the leaders of the work.

(5) Certain days must be set apart, which may be called decision days, or harvest days for the school, or times of special waiting upon God. It matters not what the name may be; but, as the farmer sows the seed and expects the harvest, so the Sunday-school superintendent has a right to believe that, when the seed has been sown, and the Spirit of God has done his work, the harvest is absolutely certain.

Yet there is this principle to be remembered in Christian work, that, whether one occupies the exalted position of minister,

superintendent, or Sunday-school teacher, or one of the humblest positions in all the household of God, it is not so much the position we are called to fill, but the spirit with which we fill it, that counts with God.

"The strong man's strength to toil for Christ,
The fervent preacher's skill, I sometimes wish:
But better far to be just what God wills.
No service in itself is small,
None great, though earth it fill;
But that is small which seeks its own,
That great which seeks God's will."

CHAPTER II.

THE TEACHER'S DEVOTIONS.

WHAT water is to the fish, and air to the bird, the Word of God is, and ought to be, to the child of God, and especially to one who would stand as a teacher of that Word. Paul's message to Timothy is likewise a message to Sunday-school teachers everywhere, — "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works" (2 Tim. 3 : 16, 17).

The most pitiable sight I know is the Sunday-school teacher trying to lead her scholars without drawing her inspiration and strength from the Bible. The lesson leaves and helps are all right in their place, and

much to be commended, but when they are recognized as a substitute for the Bible they ought to be most heartily condemned and rejected. The secret of successful teaching is always to be found in the preparation made by the teacher to meet her class.

1. The text of the lesson must be known, and the context must be thoroughly studied. This may be accomplished only by the most careful and thoughtful reading of the lesson and the suggested references. It is well to read the Revised Version always in connection with the authorized text, for sometimes the changing of a word in the Revision sheds a ray of light on a passage of Scripture hitherto incomprehensible in its meaning.

2. It is necessary that the teacher should become very familiar with any lesson helps which may shed light on the manners and customs of the people of whom the class is to study, and also the history of the times in which the lesson events are found. It is a dangerous sign when the teacher reaches the place where she may feel that she is justified in ignoring such helps as these.

3. Attend regularly some meeting of Sunday-school teachers for the study of the lesson. It is a misfortune to be connected with a school where teachers' meetings are not held. Suggestions are made in such gatherings, and side-lights are thrown on the lesson which come to one in no other form of study.

Different suggestions may be made concerning the best methods of familiarizing one's self with the text of the lesson. One of the best I have known is that practised by an aged teacher whose reputation for successful teaching extended far beyond the bounds of his school. He was not an educated man, yet he never met his class when his face did not glow with the truth he taught, and he expounded the lesson with an enthusiasm that was contagious. He had a habit of dividing the lesson, after he had familiarized himself with the whole of it, into six parts, one portion for each day of the week, and the result of all his meditation for his class on the Lord's Day. And so each day, as he went about his work, he would

meditate and pray, and talk on his daily portion, until, by the time the week would end, he would literally be on fire with the desire to reach his class. And those who know him bear testimony to the fact that he never failed to reach them.

All these general principles ought to be observed by every teacher; yet, if the work of preparing to teach stops here, the teacher has fallen far short of what she might have been in her exalted position.

If a minister studies his Bible only in order that he may prepare his sermons and preach them, with the hope that the result of his study may be for him to help others, he has missed the best part of the use of the Word of God, and fallen far short of what he might have been in his helpful ministry. He must study the Bible for himself.

What is true of the minister of the gospel is likewise true of the Sunday-school teacher. So there may be suggestions made concerning the teacher's devotions which would completely revolutionize much of the teaching and much of Christian experience. For a

time the class must be forgotten, the teacher's responsibility for others put aside; and we must only remember that we stand as individuals before God, needing him and his fulness, and demanding everything that would make his personal indwelling a reality, and his fulness a certainty.

1. *Study the Bible for yourself, for your own spiritual profit*, saying, over and over, "Teach me, O Lord." Lay the thought of your teaching others entirely aside. It is not necessary that we should take a whole chapter for a day's meditation; even a single verse will do to make what you study your own, actually a part of yourself. You will find, after a little, that your life is beginning to run over with blessing for others, and then you will realize that it is only the overflow of your life that blesses and helps those around you, just as it is the overflow of the Nile that makes the valley of that river so fertile. It is one thing to be "filled with the Spirit," and quite another thing to be "Spirit-driven." When one is driven by the Spirit, he teaches a Sunday-school class because he

thinks he must do something, and this is all he feels himself qualified to do; for this is an easy task, he thinks. This is an awful mistake, for, next to the ministry of the gospel, the teacher of a Sunday-school class occupies the highest position of responsibility. The Spirit-driven teacher finds the work a drudgery, and is glad when the day is over and the work is ended, while the one who is Spirit-filled works as naturally as he breathes, and counts Christian service his highest delight. The one who is Spirit-driven has barely enough life with which to sustain himself; the one who is Spirit-filled has life for himself, and the more abundance of life for those with whom he comes in contact.

2. *If this form of personal preparation is to be carried on, enter the school of prayer*, having only yourself continually in mind. "But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret; and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly" (Matt. 6 : 6). In this verse we

have the best instruction as to how we should pray, and what results should be expected.

(1) Every Sunday-school teacher must have a closet for prayer, the idea of which is a secret place. It must be in the place where one is least likely to interruption, but the closet is an absolute necessity.

(2) When one is in the secret place, shut the door, which carries with it the thought of the world's being for a time shut out. It is very necessary that we should be more alone with God, and less in touch with the world, if we are to be channels of the right sort.

(3) Pray in secret. There must be certain kinds of prayer which we shall offer up in our devotions, which never could be said in the public place, nor even in the hearing of our dearest friends. We must say some things to God we should not dare to say to any one else.

(4) Pray in the name of Jesus. There is nothing in one's self, however holy his life may be, that could for a moment draw to

himself the rich blessing of God which he so much needs. But, whatever may be our own condition, it is a joy to know that that name which is "above every name," and which we have a right to use, will open the richest storehouse of heaven.

Three conditions give one a right to use a name: —

(*a*) Partnership relation. We may use the name of one who is associated with us in business, and we may certainly assume that we bear this relation to Christ.

(*b*) A love relation. A wife has the right to use the name of her husband, for she has given herself to him. So we have a right to the name of our Saviour.

(*c*) A life relation. A child has the right to use the name of his father, and, since we are bound to Christ by the very life of God, it is very sure that we have the privilege of the use of his name.

(5) Believe that what you ask God for you will receive. He has promised it in his Word, and he will never break his promise.

(6) Go out to your work of living and teaching, conscious of His presence who said, "I will never leave you nor forsake you."

If such an experience as this should be given to every teacher in the Sunday school, in a little time the whole work would be revolutionized, and every Sunday school would be an actual gate into heaven's richest blessing.

3. *Appropriate Christ for your own life.* There are two indwellings spoken of in the Bible, which ought always to be considered together. First, he is in us, and second, we are in him. It has been called the reciprocal relationship. If he is in us, we may lay claim to everything that belongs to him. We have a right to claim his mind, that we may think as he thinks, to lay claim to his peace, that we may live as he lives. We may appropriate his gentleness, that we may act as he would act if he were in this world; for the literal meaning of the word "gentleness" is a disposition to be fair. In a word, to sum it all up, we may claim his spirit,

and, having his spirit, it becomes possible for us to reflect him, in all that he is, in all that we do.

If it should be objected that these suggestions savor of selfishness, then my answer is, if one is to be great, in any walk of life, he must spend weeks, months, and years in preparation for his future. And this is a time when he loses all sight of the world he hopes to influence, and thinks only of his own spirit, soul, and body, which are to be trained for world-wide influence. In order that one may make the most of the study of God's Word, his prayer, and his appropriation of Christ, it is very necessary that he shall have some special time when he may wait before God. This ought to be a time of the day when his mind would be the clearest, and he would be the least subject to interruption. One of the most encouraging and hopeful signs of the Christian Endeavor Society is its great army of young people who are to-day enrolled as "The Comrades of the Quiet Hour." It would be a good thing if there could be a circle

of Sunday-school teachers enrolled in such a company.

1. It would better be some hour early in the morning, just because the soul is more receptive at that time. The mind is refreshed and clear, and is much less occupied with worldly things. This is generally a time of quietness, and all who have tried it have found that God seems particularly near at such a time. You can all but hear him say, "Be still, and know that I am God." Miss Havergal has been quoted as saying that the reason why the church does not accomplish more is found in the fact that Christians are not spending the first hour of the day alone with God. May this not be the reason why so many have failed as Sunday-school teachers?

2. It may be necessary, for one to keep this pledge, to rise much earlier in the morning than he is accustomed to do, but Dr. Webb-Peploe has said all the great saints have been early risers, and one has only to read the letters of McCheyne, Bonar, Wesley, Whitefield, Brainerd, Müller, and Spurgeon, to find

how true this is. The pages of the Bible glow with accounts of those who have kept the early hours of the day with God. Moses in the early morning had God's revelation of his law. Isaiah was awakened morning by morning that he might learn God's truth. David said, "I myself will awake right early"; and again, "It is a good thing . . . to show forth thy lovingkindness in the morning." Jesus himself, in the morning, a great while before day, rose up and went out, and departed into a solitary place, and there prayed. Contrast with these, if you will, our own hurried devotions, or utter lack of them, and you will find the secret of failure on the part of many of the Sunday-school teachers of the present time.

3. There are certain direct advantages which may be counted upon as coming from such a time of waiting quietly before God.

(1) No amount of business during the day can then crowd out the communion with God without which the day is a failure.

(2) It is a time when we gird our armor on, and so are not routed at the approach

of the enemy. Before he comes the armor is ready for us and the sword easy to wield.

(3) It is an easy thing throughout the day to prevail with men, because we begin the day by prevailing with God.

(4) Our testimony is with power, because we have established a vital union with God, and we "live, yet not we, but Christ lives in us."

All this is one plan which, if carefully followed, may revolutionize the teacher's devotions, and, through his devotions, his life. It is certainly true that we have all been better able to manifest power with men when, first of all, we have learned the secret of power with God. That hundreds and thousands of Sunday-school teachers may be led into the secret place of blessing is my prayer.

CHAPTER III.

THE TEACHER'S RESPONSIBILITY.

NEXT to the minister of the gospel, the office of the Sunday-school superintendent and teacher is more responsible than any other position in the church. It is a work to which one should be divinely called, and for which one should be equipped of God.

It ought to be no more possible for one to be a Sunday-school teacher and not be a professed Christian than for one to be a physician without a knowledge of medicine, a mountain guide when totally blind, or a minister of the gospel without a personal knowledge of Christ as a Saviour.

It is really the "blind leading the blind," and the ditches are on every side. But He who changed Peter from the fisherman to the mighty preacher at Pentecost and the great writer of epistles, waits to change and

equip us all. "Ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you," was certainly meant to include Sunday-school teachers.

There are very many reasons why the position is one of great responsibility.

1. Because one is a teacher. It is not possible to be an instructor in the day-schools without a thorough knowledge of the subjects to be taught, and it is not possible to hold such a position unless the teacher has a gift to impart that knowledge to the pupil. This is strenuously insisted upon.

And, while it would not be within the range of possibilities for a Sunday-school teacher to master the Word of God as completely as he could know mathematics or the science of language if his teaching is secular, yet there are certain things which every teacher in the Sunday school should know.

(1) He ought to be very sure that the Bible is the Word of God; the Sunday school is not the place for the discussion of authorship and kindred topics.

(2) He ought to know that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, for he may know this by reading the Gospel of John, the key-verse of which is John 20 : 31 : "But these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God."

And, when these two great underlying truths have been accepted, then there are certain others which every successful teacher ought certainly to hold and teach.

(1) He ought to believe that he is saved himself. And this is not a matter for speculation; he may know. See 1 John 5 : 13 : "These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God; that ye may know that ye have eternal life."

(2) He ought to believe that the scholar old enough to accept of Christ is in need of a Saviour, and he ought to know what the Scriptures say concerning him. See Rom. 3 : 22, 23 : "There is no difference: for all have sinned." Also, see John 3 : 18 : "He that believeth not is condemned already."

(3) He certainly ought to know that the life yielded to Christ, whatever may be the

past experience, may be transformed into a character of real beauty. See Eph. 2 : 10: "For we are his workmanship." He has a plan for every life, and will work that plan out if unhindered.

2. It is a responsible position because he is a teacher of God's word. And, since it is God's word, He must be the interpreter of it.

This is a day of valuable lesson helps, and it would be a most serious mistake if these were all set aside because some are not to be commended. It is safe to say to the teacher, "Use everything good, view the truth from every standpoint, talk with others concerning the lesson, attend teachers' meetings, and absorb everything that may help you with your scholars." But it will be a calamity if you fail in the end to go to Him who inspired holy men of old to write the book.

With every help secured from men get alone with God very often, and say to him over and over, "Speak, Lord; for thy servant heareth." Then say, "Open thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things"; and he will not disappoint you.

Only let it be remembered that often you will have to wait in his presence. We have frequently missed the blessing of an audience with him because we have been in too much of a hurry. "Wait patiently" is a needed admonition for many of us. "Be still, and know that I am God," is for us all.

3. In all probability the Sunday-school teacher stands between the scholar and life or death. How could it be any other than a position of grave responsibility?

If one should be told to write on a piece of parchment a line which was to stand for or against him at the judgment, how carefully he would write! Yet in the teaching every Sunday in the schools, lives and characters are being moulded for eternity.

A flippant teacher might turn a child forever against sacred things, a careless teacher might in one sentence plant in a little life a seed which would produce in after years a harvest of all that is bad, while an unsaved teacher might be the cause of the loss of a soul. At the same time, it is true that a faithful, consecrated, godly teacher might in

one lesson lead a scholar to Christ, and in that one add a nation to the kingdom of God.

I have in mind a missionary of wide repute, a minister of international reputation, an evangelist of world-wide fame, all of them led to Christ as boys in the Sunday school, the teacher being used of God to reach them. The missionary has made continents glow with the glory of God, the minister has led multitudes to a better Christian experience, while the evangelist has led tens of thousands to the Master he serves. Only God knows the turn that might have been given to these lives if these boys had fallen into the hands of the teacher that was flippant, careless, or unsaved.

4. The position is one of great responsibility because the scholar is a keen critic and usually a good judge of character.

(1) Suppose the child comes from a home where the parents are most consistent Christians, where the father is a saint and the mother angelic in the child's estimation. If the Sunday-school teacher is not able to com-

pare favorably with them in Christian character, his influence counts for nothing, and it is almost impossible to make up for the loss.

(2) Suppose, on the other hand, the scholar comes from a home where the parents are either inconsistent or unsaved, and no spiritual atmosphere surrounds him for six days in the week. Then the teacher must make up in one short hour in one day of the week for the inconsistency of the parents or the godlessness of the home, or there will be perilous times before the child. Some scholars receive their first impressions of Christ from the character of the Sunday-school teacher. God pity us if we fail here!

It is indeed a position which an angel might long to fill, but which the best of men might tremble at the thought of occupying; and if, as a result of this meditation, some should say, "Who is sufficient for these things?" the answer would lead me to my closing thought.

5. Our help must come from God. He is able to make all grace abound. There is surely no cause for discouragement, for he

has made certain definite promises to us, not one of which will be broken.

(1) He will be mouth and wisdom to us, and Paul goes so far as to say that we may have his mind. How this ought to open up unto us the Scriptures!

(2) He will overcome our feebleness. "My strength is made perfect in weakness." We thus need only by faith to link our weakness to his almightiness, and who can estimate the result of our service?

(3) He will counteract our fear. He said: "Be not afraid," "I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee," "Lo, I am with you alway"; and that means in the whole Sunday school and in every class. Who can describe the courage that would fill a teacher's soul, did he but realize the Master's presence?

(4) He is pledged to look out for the results of our work, and we need not be disturbed. "My word . . . shall not return unto me void." Only let it be remembered, (1) God will use with power only the teacher with a clean life and a surrendered will.

(2) He will not bless the presentation of anything less than his word.

I am well aware that this ideal for the Sunday-school teacher is a high one; but I am equally sure that it is possible of attainment, and that in reaching out after it we shall be filled with a joy unspeakable, for we shall be pleasing Him of whom we teach, and shall one day hear him say, "Well done, good and faithful servant: . . . enter thou into the joy of thy Lord."

CHAPTER IV.

DECISION DAY IN THE SUNDAY SCHOOL.

If a farmer were to occupy all his time in sowing the seed and make no provision for the gathering of a harvest which he would have a right to expect, we should think him bereft of all reason. There are certain laws governing the sowing of seed, the watching for growth and development, and the reaping of the harvest. It is likewise true that there are certain well-defined laws concerning the use of God's word in teaching and preaching. It is the good seed indeed, and the heart of a child has always been found to be particularly good ground upon which it may fall.

There is a clear promise in the Bible that God's word shall not return unto him void,

but shall accomplish that which he pleases and prosper in the thing whereunto he hath sent it. If, therefore, there are few conversions and the harvest in the Sunday school is not gathered, the responsibility for failure cannot be with the Lord of the harvest, but must be with those of us who are supposed to be the laborers in his harvest field. I can find no reason in God's word why there should not be a constant ingathering of the children and young people into the kingdom of heaven, why there may not be frequent harvest seasons and oft-repeated decision days. In order that Sunday-school workers may be led to expect and work for such seasons of blessing, this message is sent forth.

It is necessary first of all that there should be certain propositions stated and accepted before we may be expected to gather the results of our work.

First, It must be accepted as true that when a child has reached the age of accountability, where he may intelligently accept or reject Christ as a Saviour, he needs Christ in order

that he may be saved. "There is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved." This text applies to a child having reached the age of accountability as well as to those older in years. If we do not accept this statement, we shall not be much concerned about their souls.

Second, We do not know just when our children may reach the point of responsibility. It is said that in the Niagara River there is one point called "Past Redemption Point," and that, if one reaches and passes this place, he is hurried on to the rapids and the chances are all against his life's being saved. We do not know at what age our children may pass this point in their lives.

Third, This being true, it is wise for us to present Christ to them as a Saviour very early in their lives. It is said that the cannon-ball passing through a four-foot bore of the cannon receives its impulse for the whole course it is to travel. And the statement has been made that the Catholic authorities have said, "If you will give us your children for

the first nine years of their lives, you can never win them away from us." It is therefore doubtless true that many a child receives impressions before he is ten years of age that determine the whole course of his after life. What an awful responsibility not to present Christ to him as Saviour and keeper!

Fourth, The history of the church proves that many of those who have been the real pillars in the house of God came to an acceptance of Christ before the age of twelve years. So, whatever may be our individual opinion concerning the conversion of children, God has set his approval on the work and has said, "Suffer the little children to come unto me, and forbid them not; for of such is the kingdom of God."

In an audience of five thousand people in a Western city I asked all who had accepted Christ between the ages of ten and twenty to rise, and it seemed as if the entire audience was standing. When those who had come between the ages of twenty and thirty were asked to stand, the number was greatly diminished, not more than four hundred

being on their feet. When the ages were changed to between forty and fifty, there were not more than a hundred standing, and when it was suggested that all who had accepted Christ between the ages of fifty and sixty should stand there were only four in five thousand who stood to make such confession. I am aware that this may not have been an exact test, for not all may have perfectly understood the call; but it can be proved by the statistics of the church that the majority of people come to Christ before the age of twenty, and if they do not come at this time the chances begin to run mightily against them.

Fifth, To put any hindrance in the way of their coming, or to be indifferent to their acceptance of Christ, is a responsibility too grave to be borne by any of us.

The little son of a distinguished minister came to him one day to say that he wanted to become a member of the church. His father thought he knew the boy and said to him, "My son, you may not understand just what it means to join the church." The

child, however, assured him that he did. Finally, the father persuaded him to accept this proposition. He said: "We are just now going away for the summer vacation. When we come back, if you still wish it, we will then take you into the church." This was not according to the boy's desire, but he yielded. The summer passed, but, said this minister: "When I came back in the fall, I came back without my boy. He died in the summer days." Doubtless the child was accepted of Christ because of his desire, but I am firmly convinced that he ought to have been in the church; and the father believes it, too, to-day.

There are those who will not come to Christ if they are not urged to do so in childhood. In one of the cities of New York a minister arose in one of the meetings to say: "Let me tell you of a playmate of mine, a little girl. There was a special service in the school of which we were both members; an appeal was made which resulted in my own conversion. This girl was even more deeply moved than I, but,

there being no one to lead her to a decision, she left the school. I met her years after in Paris, when I asked her if she ever became a Christian. With a sneer on her face that had once been wet with tears, she said: 'Why, I never think of it, and have not for years. I have clearly made up my mind that I shall never be a Christian.'" What God in his mercy may do for her before her life's journey ends I cannot say, but there was a time when as a child one touch of helpfulness would have led her to a decision.

Sixth, When you lead a child to Christ, as a rule the work does not stop with that one little life. Others have been won indirectly by that one. Characters have been transformed and entire homes have been changed by the conversion of children.

I was preaching in an Ohio city when I had one night pointed out to me in the audience one of the leading business men of the State. His wife sat with him, and between them their one little child. I have never had more indifferent or inattentive

auditors than the gentleman and his wife; they paid no attention to either speaking or singing, but the little child scarcely took her eyes from me. The meeting closed and they went home; the child's heart had been touched. When she climbed up into her father's arms to say good-night, she said to him, "Papa, I wish you would be a Christian so that I could be one too." What the sermon and the song had failed to do, the child had accomplished. And before they slept that night both the father and the mother had yielded themselves to Christ.

It is not impossible that a "decision day" in the Sunday school might mean entire households saved. If we have been faithful in our work as teachers and superintendents, there are certain things we have a right to expect from God.

First, That he will honor his own word.

If you have presented the plan of salvation to your scholars, and stand ready to be used of God to help the scholar to a confession of Christ, you have a right to

expect that he will set his seal upon your work.

Second, If you have presented Christ to your scholars, you have a perfect right to believe that the Spirit of God will witness to him and make him a power in the life of your scholar; for this is his work.

Third, You have a perfect right also, these conditions being fulfilled, to look for and expect the conversion of the scholars of your class.

THE NAME.

The day in the interests of which this message is sent forth may well be called the "decision day in the Sunday school." It would be perfectly natural to expect conversions constantly; and, if our schools were as God would have them be, our children would come as naturally into the kingdom of God as the sun rises in the morning and sets at night. But it is a wise thing, even if this be true, to appoint certain days when decisions may be wisely and strongly urged. These days may be more or less frequent,

as the workers in the church may elect, but ought certainly to be observed each year, although in some schools they are held as often as once a quarter, and always with blessing.

Let the following rules be adopted, or modified so as to meet the needs of the various communities; and the writer can assure those following them that the efforts will certainly be crowned with success.

1. Plan and pray about the time you set apart, and let it be far enough in the future to prevent anything from coming in the way of its successful prosecution or standing before it as a hindrance.

2. When the day arrives, let the pastor preach such a sermon as would lead parents to see their responsibility and make the teachers understand their opportunity for marvellous service.

3. Appoint a prayer meeting for the teachers at least half an hour before the time of the session of the school. In this meeting let special prayer be offered; first, for the teachers, that they may be specially

anointed for this special work; second, for the unconverted scholars. It is a good plan to have the names before you for special mention. In one school in Pennsylvania the pastor himself had secured the names of seventy-five of the scholars who had not accepted Christ, and with all the teachers on their knees he read over these names one by one until he could read no more, because of the sobs of those who filled the room, and he told me when the results were tabulated that he did not believe there was one of the seventy-five that had not taken a stand for Christ.

4. Make the session of the school special in every way.

(1) Sing only such hymns as would produce a tender impression upon both scholar and teacher. Much of the so-called Sunday-school music would be inappropriate for such a day. Such hymns as "Just as I am, without one plea," "Nearer, my God, to thee," "Jesus, lover of my soul," and "Jesus paid it all" would be most helpful.

(2) Mark the attendance and take the

offering of the school, so that nothing may be in the way at the close of the session when the special appeal is to be made by the pastor.

(3) Call on different teachers to pray briefly as they sit with their scholars, so that at once it may be understood that the session of the school is special and that you are waiting much upon God about it.

(4) It is always best to dispense entirely with the regular lesson, whatever it may be. I know the objections urged against this plan, especially when the lesson seems appropriate; but I know also that nothing makes a deeper impression on the scholars than to have the announcement made from the desk, "There will be no special study of the lesson to-day, for we have a matter of greater importance before us." Such an announcement being made, you will find that a kind of hush will fall upon the school, and this is the beginning of the blessing. Put absolute confidence in God; then do as has been suggested by some one else; "having planned your work, work your plan."

THE PLAN.

First, let the superintendent say that the day is special. Let him tell the scholars with all tenderness that he is concerned for them. Let him state briefly what they must do to be saved. If he has been much in prayer about it, God will use him, and the scholars will be deeply impressed by the mere statement of the man who stands as their leader in the work of the Sunday school.

Second, Let him then give the teachers an opportunity to make their plea. They know the scholars intimately enough to speak wisely with them. I remember one class in the Sunday school where as I entered the room I saw the scholars' heads all bowed in prayer, and as I passed by I heard the teacher say, "O God, save my scholars to-day."

It is not a time for argument, but just an opportunity for the plain, tender statement of the way of life out of a full heart. It is well to have an acknowledgment card, which the teacher may use to secure the

names of those who take even a slight stand for Christ, in order that it may be a matter of record. The following is a sample: —

ACKNOWLEDGMENT CARD.

I do acknowledge that Jesus Christ is my Saviour.

It is my honest purpose to serve him all my life.

Scholar's Name . . . . . .
Address . . . . . .
Teacher's Name . . . . . .
Date . . . . Class No . . . .

It is natural that I should believe heartily in such a plan. I was a scholar in a Sunday school in Richmond, Ind., when some one was making an appeal to the scholars to confess Christ by rising. The most of my class of boys were standing, and I was saying to myself: "Why should I stand? My mother and father are both Christians. I think I believe in Christ. For me to stand is not a necessity," when suddenly I felt a touch on my shoulder, and my teacher,

Mrs. C. C. Binckley, was saying, "Had n't you better stand?" And somehow she got her hand just under my elbow and seemed to lift me up. I shall never forget my standing that day. Whether I had been accepted of God before that day or not I cannot say, but I do know that the deepest impression of my life was made at that minute, and under God my Sunday-school teacher was the channel through which the blessing came.

Third, When the superintendent has made his statement, and the teachers' record of those who desire to know Christ has been made by the signing of the acknowledgment card, then let the pastor take full charge, and, as if no statement had been made before, lay before the scholars the way of life, their need of Christ, and press home upon them the desirability of an immediate decision for Christ. Any method may be used to lead to a final surrender which may be commended by the denomination in which the church is found. I remember a Methodist church in Brooklyn where at least one

hundred scholars bowed at the altar, and also recall a Presbyterian school where the scholars by standing one after another signified their determination to serve Christ. It is a serious mistake not to keep a record of all the names of those who thus take their stand in the service.

CARING FOR THE RESULTS.

What shall be done with those who have made a decision? This is a serious question, and can be settled only by the pastors, superintendents, and teachers. If allowed to drift, the action in the Sunday school may mean very little, but if carefully nurtured the greater proportion of those signing the acknowledgment cards may ultimately be found in the church.

In some cases they may be received at once into the fellowship of the church, although it would seem better to form them into a special class and give them such instruction as they may need to become intelligent members of the church. I have known of special cases where for two years

the classes were thus instructed until the whole number had been received into the church.

This whole method of the decision day is like the Scotch woman's promises in the Bible. After very many of them she had placed the two letters, "T. P.," and, when asked for the meaning of the letters, she replied, "They mean 'Tried and proven.'" So it is with these suggestions. In many cities and towns throughout the country they have been put to the test, and God has set his seal upon them.

Only this in conclusion: Since it is so very difficult to lead strong men and women to a decision after they have rejected Christ for many years, and since the natural time for one to come to Christ is in youth, as the church's statistics will prove, it behooves us to lay hold upon these gracious opportunities given us of God to save the young, and, if we should fail, there will be perilous times before the church in the future.

There are clear indications in these days of a coming revival which shall sweep over

this land of ours and carry blessing wherever the gospel is preached. Not the least of these indications is an increasing concern on the part of Sunday-school teachers for their scholars, and a marked willingness on the part of the young people to come to Christ.

This message is sent forth with the prayer that God may make it a blessing to Sunday schools everywhere, and that thousands and tens of thousands of children may speedily be won to Christ.

HOW TO AID INQUIRERS.

Always use God's word, and if your experience is quoted at all, let it be used only to emphasize the Scripture. In the general meetings you will find it easy to put the question very kindly and courteously to the people, "Are you a Christian?" If the answer is "No," help them in every way you can. You will find about you four classes of inquirers.

1. *Christians who lack assurance.* — The First Epistle of John was written to help this class. Emphasize 1 John 5 : 13.

2. Backsliders. — Read the prophecy of Jeremiah for yourself, and give them its spirit. Use Jer. 3 : 12, 13. Read Hosea, fourteenth chapter, especially the opening verses.

3. Those slightly convicted. — Read Rom. 3 : 10-23. It is useless to give the consolations of the gospel until there is consciousness of sin.

4. The deeply convicted. — Read Isa. 43 : 25 44 : 22; John 1 : 11, 12. Tell them they may be sure of their salvation. Read John 3 : 16; 5 : 24; 6 : 47; Rom. 6 : 23.

The following excuses may be presented; if so, answer them with God's word.

1. "*I can't understand.*" — "There is none that understandeth; there is none that seeketh after God." Rom. 3 : 11. "But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness unto him; neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned." 1 Cor. 2 : 14.

2. Afraid of falling. — "Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the

day of Jesus Christ." Phil. 1 : 6. "Kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation, ready to be revealed in the last time." 1 Pet. 1 : 5.

3. Afraid of temptation. — "There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it." 1 Cor. 10 : 13. "For, in that he himself hath suffered, being tempted, he is able to succor them that are tempted." Heb. 2 : 18.

4. Inconsistent Christians prevent. — "But why dost thou judge thy brother? or why dost thou set at naught thy brother? For we shall all stand before the judgment-seat of Christ. So, then, every one of us shall give account of himself to God." Rom. 14 : 10, 12. "Therefore thou art inexcusable, O man, whosoever thou art that judgest, for wherein thou judgest another thou condemnest thyself." Rom. 2 : 1.

5. When to believe. — "Choose you this

day whom ye will serve." Josh. 24 : 15. "Come, for all things are now ready." Luke 14 : 17. "Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation." 2 Cor. 6 : 2.

THE END.

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